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To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



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**Vision:** To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**REMINDER TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS AGAINST AMOEBA**

**ORLANDO** - The Florida Department of Health in Orange and Seminole Counties are reminding families to take precautions when enjoying fresh water activities the rest of this hot summer. Cases of primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) have occurred recently in Florida and Arkansas. Everyone should take precautions while swimming in warm freshwater lakes and ponds due to the threat posed by the amoeba *Naegleria fowleri* especially during periods of hotter temperatures.

*Naegleria fowleri* is a naturally occurring amoeba that can be found in **any** body of fresh water such as lakes, rivers, hot springs and poorly maintained and minimally-chlorinated or un-chlorinated swimming pools. This amoeba can cause an infection known as primary amebic meningoencephalitis by traveling up the nose to the brain and spinal cord. This generally happens during activities such as swimming, diving, waterskiing, or wakeboarding. In very rare instances, *Naegleria* infections may also occur when contaminated water from other sources (such as inadequately chlorinated swimming pool water or heated and contaminated tap water) enters the nose, for example when people submerge their heads or cleanse during religious practices, and, possibly, when people irrigate their sinuses (nose).

"There is an increased risk of infection by this organism in all freshwater areas in Florida, especially during hot summer months," said Dr. Kevin M. Sherin, Director of the Department of Health in Orange County.

"Infection with *Naegleria* is most common during the hot summer months of July, August, and September. Infections usually occur when it is hot for prolonged periods, causing higher water temperatures and lower water levels," said Dr. Swannie Jett, Health Officer of the Department of Health in Seminole County.

Some measures that might reduce your risk of infection include:

- Avoiding water-related activities in bodies of warm freshwater, hot springs, and thermally-polluted water such as water around power plants.
- Avoiding water-related activities in warm freshwater during periods of high water temperature and low water levels.
- Keeping your head out of the water, holding your nose shut or using nose clips when taking part in water-related activities in bodies of warm freshwater such as lakes, rivers, or hot springs.
- Avoiding digging in or stirring up the sediment while taking part in water-related activities in shallow, warm freshwater areas.

If you are irrigating, flushing, or rinsing your sinuses (for example, by using a neti pot), use water that has been:

- distilled;
- sterilized;

**Florida Department of Health in Orange County**

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- previously boiled for 1 minute (at elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for 3 minutes) and left to cool; or filtered, using [a filter with an absolute pore size of 1 micron or smaller](#).
- Rinse the irrigation device after each use with water that has been distilled, sterilized, filtered, or previously boiled and leave the device open to air dry completely.

Although infections are rare, most prove to be fatal. Seek medical care immediately if you develop a sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, and vomiting, especially if you have been in warm fresh water within the previous 2 weeks.

People should always assume there is a low level of risk for infection whenever entering warm fresh water. For more information and to see a video Public Service Announcement (PSA) about the dangers of amoeba infections, go to [www.orchd.com](http://www.orchd.com) or <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/naegleria/>.

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